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# MANAGING COMMUNICATION

This chapter provides clear, practical guidance to help you communicate effectively, manage expectations, and support productive collaboration. It introduces foundational habits first, then progresses to more advanced communication practices. The goal is to equip you with skills you can apply immediately in any professional environment.

## FOUNDATIONS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication begins with predictable habits that build trust and prevent misunderstandings. Junior staff should master these fundamentals before applying more advanced techniques.

### ACKNOWLEDGE MESSAGES PROMPTLY

Always confirm receipt of important emails, especially those containing requests, deadlines, or action items. A brief acknowledgment prevents uncertainty and reassures the sender that their message has been received and will be addressed.

Acknowledge messages within the same business day whenever possible to demonstrate reliability and prevent delays.

After acknowledging, state when they should expect a full response. Verify your workload and calendar before committing to a timeline.

### CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS EARLY

Review each request carefully and ask clarifying questions immediately. Confirm the purpose, scope, format, timeline, and any required information or documents. Early clarification helps you determine the level of effort, identify collaborators, and set realistic deadlines.

Use a short checklist to confirm purpose, scope, format, timeline, and required documents to avoid rework and misalignment.

### CONDUCT KICK-OFF CONVERSATIONS

For complex or collaborative tasks, schedule a short verbal check-in with the requestor. Confirm:

- Your understanding of the request
- Deadline flexibility
- Expected format of the final deliverable
- Your processing timeline

Kickoff conversations reduce unnecessary back-and-forth emails and ensure both parties begin with the same understanding.

Follow every verbal conversation with a brief written summary to document expectations and protect both parties.

## MAINTAINING COMMUNICATION THROUGHOUT THE WORK

Once work begins, consistent communication prevents confusion, reduces follow-up inquiries, and strengthens your professional credibility.

### PROVIDE REGULAR STATUS UPDATES

Share your timeline early and update the requestor as work progresses. For lengthy tasks, send periodic updates or interim drafts. If you use a queue system, communicate the item's position and expected start time.

For multi-week tasks, provide weekly updates unless otherwise agreed. Keep updates brief, factual, and focused on progress and risks.

### PRIORITIZE EFFECTIVENESS OVER PERFECTION

Deliver an early working draft rather than waiting for a polished version. Early feedback prevents misalignment and reduces rework. Use a simple rhythm: draft, feedback, revise, confirm, finalize.

An early draft can be as simple as an outline or partial content to confirm direction before investing significant time.

### MAKE CLEAR REQUESTS

When you need additional information, send a concise message that explains:

- Why the recipient is receiving the request
- What you need
- How you need it
- When you need it
- What happens if the information is not provided

Avoid long messages that may be overlooked. If anything remains unclear, call rather than extending the email chain.

Use subject lines that clearly indicate urgency or required action to help the recipient prioritize your request.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT COMMUNICATION METHOD

Selecting the appropriate communication channel improves efficiency and reduces misunderstandings.

### WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Email is a primary professional tool. Use it to:

- Request information or documents
- Confirm decisions or agreements
- Document discussions, expectations, and next steps

When requesting something in writing, ensure the reader can quickly understand what you need. Include specific details, quantities, deadlines, and required formats.

Avoid email for urgent or sensitive matters; use verbal communication instead and follow with written confirmation.

### DOCUMENTING AGREEMENTS

Summarize discussions, decisions, and responsibilities in writing. Include:

- What was discussed
- What was agreed
- What will occur next
- Who is responsible

This written summary becomes the reference point for future updates or issue escalation. Send written summaries within 24 hours to maintain accuracy and momentum.

### DOCUMENTING ISSUES OR SUCCESSES

If problems arise, document what was expected, what occurred, why it occurred, and what actions are needed to resolve the issue.

For successful outcomes, document what was requested, what was delivered, and where the final deliverable is stored.

Use a simple structure such as Expected, Actual, Cause, and Next Steps to ensure clarity and consistency.

### VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Use verbal communication when:

- The topic is complex
- Written messages would become too long
- You need full context or clarification

Prepare for verbal conversations by reviewing notes and identifying key questions beforehand.

After the conversation, send a written summary to confirm your understanding and the agreed-upon approach.

## MANAGING PRESSURE IN VERBAL EXCHANGES

Verbal conversations often create pressure to respond immediately. Avoid over-promising or giving uninformed answers. If you need time to research, say so and follow up by email with accurate information. Request more time than you think you need to account for unforeseen issues.

Take notes during the conversation to avoid committing prematurely and to support accurate follow-up.

## PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT AND COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE

This chapter consolidates three critical principles: avoiding absolutes, maintaining a customer service mindset, and preventing surprises. These principles strengthen your credibility and help you navigate complex or sensitive situations.

### AVOIDING ABSOLUTES

Avoid giving definitive yes or no answers when you do not have full information or when there may be more than one way to address the issue. Instead, provide all applicable options so the requestor can form their own opinion and determine the best solution for their situation. Example: Instead of saying “No, that cannot be done,” say “Based on the information available, here are the options that may work.”

Keep in mind that they possess the full picture, while you often see only a portion. Your role is to outline the possible paths, explain the implications of each, and allow them to choose the most appropriate approach.

### CUSTOMER SERVICE MINDSET

Your responsibility is to guide others through policies, procedures, and requirements with clarity and accuracy. When possible, include a screenshot of the relevant policy section to support your explanation. This strengthens your credibility, reduces misinterpretation, and provides the requestor with a concrete reference.

Your goal is not to please but to facilitate understanding, interpret requirements, and help others navigate processes effectively.

## DO NOT SURPRISE

Avoid surprising your stakeholders. Communicate early when delays, issues, or changes arise. If a matter exceeds your authority, expertise, or comfort level, escalate it to your hierarchy immediately. Escalation protects you from being caught in the middle of an issue you are not equipped or authorized to resolve. Involving the appropriate parties sooner rather than later ensures faster resolution and maintains transparency for everyone involved.

Escalate even minor issues early if they have the potential to impact timelines, compliance, or stakeholder expectations.

## COMMUNICATION RISKS TO AVOID

### NO PRIVACY AT WORK

Anything written on work systems can be accessed by your employer. Avoid jokes, complaints, or informal comments. Use work tools professionally and reserve personal matters for personal devices. Assume work systems are visible to leadership at all times, even without explicit monitoring notices.

### THINK BEFORE YOU WRITE

Do not send messages written in haste or under strong emotion. Ensure you have the correct facts, documents, and references before responding. Compose messages when calm, focused, and fully informed.

Before sending, ask yourself: Am I calm? Do I have the facts? Is this the right channel? Is my message clear?

### AVOID PUTTING SENSITIVE MATTERS IN WRITING

Sensitive or compliance-related matters should be handled with care because anything written on work systems can be reviewed during audits or investigations. Issues that require full context or may involve confidentiality concerns are best addressed verbally rather than documented in writing. HR and leadership are responsible for investigating these matters and preparing any required reports. Written records can be retrieved even if deleted, and all systems may be subject to scrutiny during an audit. Only document sensitive issues when instructed by HR or leadership or when you are raising matters that directly affect or impact you.

## PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR MANAGING COMMUNICATION

### 1. Acknowledge Messages Promptly

- **Do**
  - Confirm receipt of important emails and state when the sender should expect a full response.
- **Don't**
  - Leave messages unacknowledged, creating uncertainty or forcing others to follow up.

## 2. Clarify Expectations Early

- **Do**
  - Ask questions immediately to confirm purpose, scope, format, and deadlines.
- **Don't**
  - Assume details or proceed without full understanding.

## 3. Use Kick-off Conversations for Complex Work

- **Do**
  - Schedule a brief check-in to confirm expectations and timelines.
- **Don't**
  - Rely solely on email for complex or multi-step tasks.

## 4. Provide Regular Status Updates

- **Do**
  - Share progress, challenges, and expected timelines proactively.
- **Don't**
  - Wait for others to ask for updates or request clarification.

## 5. Prioritize Effectiveness Over Perfection

- **Do**
  - Send early drafts to confirm direction and gather feedback.
- **Don't**
  - Hold work until it is fully polished and risk misalignment.

## 6. Make Clear and Concise Requests

- **Do**
  - State exactly what you need, how you need it, and by when.
- **Don't**
  - Send long or vague messages that may be misunderstood or ignored.

## 7. Choose the Right Communication Method

- **Do**

- Use verbal communication for complex topics and written communication for documentation.
- **Don't**
  - Force everything into email when a short conversation would be faster and clearer.

## 8. Document Agreements and Decisions

- **Do**
  - Summarize discussions, decisions, and next steps in writing.
- **Don't**
  - Rely on memory or verbal agreements alone.

## 9. Apply Professional Judgment

- **Do**
  - Provide options instead of absolutes, reference policies when possible, and escalate issues beyond your authority.
- **Don't**
  - Give definitive answers without full information or handle issues you are not authorized to resolve.

## 10. Communicate Issues Early

- **Do**
  - Alert stakeholders immediately when delays, risks, or changes arise.
- **Don't**
  - Allow surprises or last-minute disclosures that undermine trust.

## CONCLUSION

Effective communication is a core professional skill. By acknowledging messages promptly, clarifying expectations, providing consistent updates, choosing the right communication method, and applying disciplined judgment, you strengthen your credibility and support productive collaboration. These habits position you for long-term success in any professional environment.